



Imagine you are busily working on some task around the house. Now imagine your son or daughter (or the neighbor-kid if you don't have children) comes up behind you and says "Mommy (or Daddy), can I kill it?"

Hopefully, the first thing out of your mouth would be "what is it". Or, at least you would ask that to yourself before you turned around to have a look. Because what "it" is matters. We all know there is a difference between a bug picked up off of the ground and the family pet. We also know there is a difference between the family pet and Baby Brother or Sister. So, before we give a response to our little questioner, we had better first figure out what it is he or she is asking to terminate.

This simple scenario demonstrates the only question that matters in the discussion around abortion and that is "what is it?" What is the thing inside the woman that an abortion procedure seeks to remove? Because what "it" is matters.

The Pro-Life Argument

The intro of this article was a very natural way to get into a discussion regarding the Pro-Life argument. And, the argument isn't one that is based on Christianity or the Bible- although it is consistent with the Bible. It's based on simple, fundamental principles. That argument goes like this:

1. Intentionally killing an innocent human being is morally wrong
2. Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.
3. Therefore, abortion is morally wrong

This argument is very simple and logically air-tight. In other words, if the first two premises are true then the conclusion logically follows. I don't know many people who would deny the first premise. If you do, you're either just being argumentative or you need to be committed to a mental institution. The debate revolves around the second premise. It's what I was hinting at in the intro of the article. Does abortion kill an innocent human being?

What Is An Abortion?

Up until Roe v Wade was overturned, it seemed we all understood what we were talking about when the term abortion was mentioned. Almost overnight, new cases of what is considered abortion were tossed in. Before we can discuss issues we may disagree on, we must agree to the terms that we are using. So, let's start by defining abortion.



According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, an abortion is an induced procedure to end a pregnancy. Broadly speaking, that *would* include procedures that terminate ectopic pregnancies (pregnancies where the egg attaches somewhere other than the uterus). With an ectopic pregnancy, the mother's life could be at risk if the baby comes to term. Pro-Life advocates are not suggesting that the mother's life should be at risk in order to give birth. The type of abortions we are talking about here are the ones where the decision is made to end the life of an innocent human being when there is no risk to the mother's life.

Tossing in the ectopic pregnancy case and the case of forcing a mother to pass a stillborn child (which I have heard added as well) are just attempts to redefine terms and cause confusion. When two people sit down to discuss the issue of abortion we all know the scenarios we are talking about.

What Is It?

Now we come to what I proposed is the only question that matters in the debate. As I mentioned earlier, most of the contention comes with premise 2 of the argument - that abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being. Most people agree that an abortion is a procedure that is done to remove *something*. Many groups will call it "a pregnancy", some will want to call it "a clump of cells". But, as we said earlier, it's important to get the definition of "it" right because what "it" is matters.

In discussions about abortion I've had it said to me that we don't know when life really starts anyway. This is actually false. Just open an embryology textbook and you will find that when life begins is pretty clear. Let's look at a few

"A zygote is the beginning of a new human being, Human development begins at fertilization. The process during which a male gamete or sperm...unites with a female gamete or oocyte...to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as unique individuals"

Keith Moore and T.V.N. Persaud, The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology (6th ed.)

"The development of a human being begins with fertilization, a process by which



two highly specialized cells, the *spermatozoon* from the male and the oocyte from the female, unite to give rise to a new organism, the *zygote*.”

Langman, Jan. Medical Embryology. 3rd edition.

Although life is a continuous process, fertilization...is a critical landmark because, under ordinary circumstances, a new, genetically distinct human organism is formed

Ronan O’Rahilly and Fabiola Muller, Human Embryology & Teratology, 3rd ed

When the sperm and the egg join together, the result is a zygote. This zygote is a living, distinct, and whole human being. We know that it is living because it is growing. Dead things don’t grow. We also know that it is genetically distinct from the mother. And, we know that it is a human because we know that when it comes out of the mother it will be a human. There will be no surprises. We don’t sit there with bated breath wondering if she will give birth to a baby seal or a puppy.

The *whole* human being part can be a little hard to believe. I get that. Embryos look more alien than human at certain stages. But, everything you need to become you is right there from the moment the sperm and egg come together. You didn’t “evolve” or “come from” an embryo. Zygote, embryo, and fetus are just different stages of development of the same human being. Just like infant, toddler, teenager, adult, and elderly are different stages. Our bodies are continually changing from the time we are conceived to the time we die. Just because the beginning doesn’t look like the end doesn’t mean they aren’t the same being.

The SLED of Differences

It would be ignorant of me to deny that there *are* differences between a zygote, an embryo, a fetus, and a fully grown human being. Before we can decide what to do with the life growing inside of the mother we have to ask ourselves if any of these differences matter. Do these differences make the fetus any more or less viable? The differences fall into one or more of four categories - size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency. An easy way to remember these categories is with the acronym SLED.

Size

The first category of differences has to do with Size. The embryo is *much* smaller than the



average human being. But, is size important? As Master Yoda once wisely said, “judge me by my size do you?”. Do tall people have more value than short people? If so, I’m in trouble. Should we kill off all of the short people to get “tallness” to become more dominant in the gene pool? What about growth? Do I increase in value as I grow? Did I achieve my maximal value when I reached my final height? Was I less valuable as an infant and became increasingly valuable as I grew into adulthood based on my increase in size? Do people who have the condition known as dwarfism have less value than someone of normal height? Obviously not.

Level of Development

How about Level of Development? When you look at an embryo, it’s missing a lot of stuff. Its organs aren’t fully formed. But, do things get more and more value the further they are in the developmental stage? Up until babies are about a year old, they can’t talk, they can barely walk, and they don’t have any teeth. Up until the teenage years, the person isn’t able to reproduce. The brain isn’t fully formed until the mid-20s. Does this mean that a person reaches their maximal value when they reach adulthood? Does a tantrum-throwing toddler have less value than a fully formed adult? No, they have equal value.

Environment

Does your location give you more or less value? Do you have less value when you are at home laying in bed than you do when you are sitting at your desk in the office getting work done? Do kids have less value when they are playing video games than they do when they are sitting in a classroom? There is nothing magical about the change from being in the womb to being outside. You don’t suddenly increase in value by making a 7-inch journey from the uterus to the outside world. There is nothing different about you apart from where you are. A baby isn’t any “less alive” inside the womb than outside.

Degree of Dependency

I would have to say that most of the arguments I hear for abortion somehow bring up the fetus’ level of dependency on the mother. Because the fetus needs the mother’s body in order to continue its development, that means it is not a whole human being yet. But, at what point does the level of dependency not matter anymore? As soon as the baby is born, it’s still dependent on the mother and father. If no one feeds him or her, they will starve to death. If no one bathes him or her, they will keep getting dirtier and dirtier. If no one protects him or her, they will fall victim to any predator who comes along. Does the lack of any of those abilities justify killing the baby?



At what point does the level of dependency not matter anymore? Because I'm here to tell you, there are a *lot* of 20-somethings today who if we kicked them out the door to make their way in the world, wouldn't make it. They would depend on their parents to pay for everything - or at least supplement their income in order for them to make it.

What about those who are born with something like severe autism or Down's Syndrome? Or, what about someone who is a paraplegic? These people are incapable of ever taking care of themselves. Because they require constant care, does that make them less valuable?

What about those who are older? As we get on in years and our health fades, we start depending on others to help us out. We might need family and friends to help us get around. We might even need medical professionals to care for us every day - much like a baby or a toddler. Does that mean that because our level of dependency begins to increase in our old age that we are less valuable?

Differences Don't Matter

We need to be mindful of assigning a different level of value to people - born or unborn - based on categories. All of these categories were also used by pro-slavery advocates in the 1800s, too. Abraham Lincoln had this to say about assigning value to people based on their characteristics:

You say A. is white, and B. is black. It is color, then; the lighter, having the right to

enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet,

with a fairer skin than your own.

You do not mean color exactly?—You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of

the blacks, and, therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule,

you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with an intellect superior to your own.

But, say you, it is a question of interest; and, if you can make it your interest, you have

the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right



to enslave you.

Abraham Lincoln, from his personal notes

We cannot use categories or properties to determine the value or viability of a living person. Using qualifiers to determine whether or not a life should be permitted to continue can lead to some very dark places. And, it already has in many of the world's most horrific atrocities. *All* life has value. Or none of it does and society can pick and choose who to keep around based on whatever standard the culture deems appropriate.

We Know What “It” Is

The scientific evidence that shows that we are living, distinct, and whole human beings from the moment of conception is overwhelming. Whenever we want to use science to evaluate when life begins, we get results that put the beginning earlier and earlier - not further ahead. As soon as the sperm and the egg come together, new life begins.

We Know What Abortion Does

Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being. Even the biggest figures of the Pro-Abortion crowd understand this. Faye Wattleton, the former head of Planned Parenthood says “I think we have deluded ourselves into believing that people don’t know that abortion is killing. So any pretense that abortion is not killing is a signal of our ambivalence, a signal that we cannot say yes, it kills a fetus.”

Bernard Nathenson, a former abortionist and head of NARAL (an organization whose mission is worldwide abortion advocacy) once wrote:

There is simply no doubt that even the early embryo is a human being. All its genetic coding and all its features are indisputably human. As to being, there is no doubt that it exists, is alive, is self-directed, and is not the the same being as the mother-and is therefore a unified whole.

Abortion is killing. As to *what* abortion kills there can be no doubt; abortion intentionally kills an *innocent human being*. And, human beings must be considered to have an intrinsic value for no other reason than they exist. Otherwise, it opens society up to justify all manner of abuses and atrocities.



The Only Question That Matters In The Pro-Life vs Pro-Choice Debate

Life begins at conception. And, all life has intrinsic value no matter the size, level of development, environment, or degree of dependency.